

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 09633 01 OF 03 281546Z
ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4488
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AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 3 TEL AVIV 9633

CAIRO FOR GEORGE SHERMAN

OKKO. 11652: N/A
TAGS: OVIP (ATHERTON, ALFRED L.)
SUBJECT: BACKGROUND BRIEFING BY AMB. ATHERTON TO U.S. AND
ISRAELI NEWS MEDIA, JULY 28, 1978, AT AMERICAN CULTURAL
CENTER IN JERUSALEM

1. FOLLOWING IS THE FIRST PART OF THE TRANSCRIPT
OF AMBASSADOR ATHERTON'S ONE HALF HOUR BACKGROUND
BRIEFING TODAY IN JERUSALEM FOR MEMBERS OF THE ISRAELI
AND AMERICAN PRESS CORPS. ATRIBUTION IS TO "U.S. OFFICIALS."
REMAINDER WILL BE SENT SEPTTEL FROM CAIRO.

2. BEGIN TEXT: "I SEE SO MANY FRIENDS HERE* I ALWAYS FEEL AS
I'M HOME IN A WAY WHEN I COME BACK TO JERUSALEM AFTER ALL
THESE VISITS. WELL, FIRST LET ME SAY THAT I DON'T THINK THAT
I'M GOING TO MAKE ANY NEWS FOR YOU THIS MORNING. IF THAT
COMES AS A SURPIRSE, WE'RE JUST NOT AT THAT KIND OF A POINT,
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 09633 01 OF 03 281546Z

BUT WHAT I DID THINK WOULD BE HELPFUL WOULD BE TO SAY JUST
A VERY FEW WORDS ABOUT HOW WE SEE THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE
NEGOTIATIONS, AND HOW THIS PHASE OF MY VISIT FITS
INTO THE CONTINUING PROCESS, AND I'LL MAKE THIS VERY
BRIEF AND GIVE AS MUCH TIME AS POSSIBLE FOR QUESTIONS.

3. "WE ARE GOING NOW ON THE LEEDS TALKS. I THINK THAT'S THE

IMPORTANT THING. WE SAID AFTER THE LEEDS TALKS THAT IN OUR VIEW THEY HAVE BEEN USEFUL, THAT THEY HAVE PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE IN DEPTH THROUGH A QUESTION AND ANSWER PROCESS THE ISRAELI AND THE EGYPTIAN WEST-BANK/GAZA PROPOSALS TO GET AT THE UNDERLYING POSITIONS AND PHILOSOPHIES AND CONCEPTS OF EACH SIDE. IT WAS AN EXPLORATORY KIND OF MEETING THAT TIME. NOW, BOTH THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT AND THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT HAVE HAD A CHANCE TO REFLECT ON LEEDS, AS WE HAVE, AND IT SEEMS TO US USEFUL TO, AT THIS POINT, GET TOGETHER AND COMPARE QUESTIONS, COMPARE NOTES, COMPARE ASSESSMENTS OF WHAT EMERGED FROM THOSE TALKS IN TERMS OF A FINER DEFINITION, IF YOU WILL, OF BOTH AREAS OF COMMON GROUND AND THE POSITIONS OF THE TWO SIDES AS WELL AS A SHARPER DEFINITION OF WHAT THE PRINCIPLE AREAS OF DISAGREEMENT ARE. THIS IS AN ESSENTIAL PRELIMINARY TO THE NEXT ROUND OF TALKS. WHERE THE COMMON ASSESSMENTS, TO THE EXTENT THAT WE CAN ARRIVE AT COMMON ASSESSMENTS FROM LEEDS, WILL BE DECIDED UPON FOR THE NEXT ROUND, AND THE NEXT ROUND WILL BE A ROUND IN WHICH I WOULD ENVISAGE THE DISCUSSIONS, THE NEGOTIATIONS BECOMING MORE PRECISE IN TERMS OF TRYING TO FIND WAYS OF RECONCILING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES. THERE WAS NO ATTEMPT REALLY AT LEEDS OTHER THAN TO EXPLORE AND UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER'S PROPOSALS. I THINK WE ARE MOVING NOW TOWARDS A PHASE WHERE IT IS GOING TO BE NECESSARY TO BEGIN TO TRY TO FIND WAYS OF RECONCILING THE PROPOSALS THE TWO SIDES HAVE PUT FORWARD. THE FOCUS REMAINS AT THIS STAGE AS IT HAS BEEN RECENTLY ON WEST BANK, GAZA, PALESTINIAN-RELATED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 09633 01 OF 03 281546Z

QUESTIONS. I THINK PERHAPS THAT'S ENOUGH OF AN INTRODUCTION AND I HAVE SOME OTHER THINGS I COULD SAY BUT I'M SURE THEY'LL COME OUT IN THE QUESTIONS."

4. Q: MR. AMBASSADOR, YOU SPEAK OF THE NEXT ROUND OF TALKS AS IF IT WERE A FOREGONE CONCLUSION THAT THE NEXT ROUND OF TALKS WILL TAKE PLACE. ARE YOU IN FACT SO CONVINCED?

5. ATHERTON: WELL, IT'S TRUE THAT THERE HAS NOT YET BEEN AGREEMENT ON THE EGYPTIAN SIDE TO THIS NEXT ROUND, OR TO THE DETAILS AND TIMING AND SO FORTH OF THE NEXT ROUND. IT IS STILL BEING DISCUSSED BETWEEN OURSELVES AND THE EGYPTIANS. I WILL BE PURSUING THIS WHEN I GET TO CAIRO: THE TIMING AND SO FORTH OF THE NEXT ROUND IS STILL BEING DISCUSSED BETWEEN OURSELVES AND THE EGYPTIANS. I WILL BE PURSUING THIS WHEN I GET TO CAIRO, BUT WE ARE CONTINUING TO PROCEED IN THE EXPECTATION THAT IT WILL FALL INTO PLACE, AND THAT THE TALKS WILL TAKE PLACE.

6. Q: DO YOU EXPECT TO GET A COMMITMENT ON YOUR TRIP FROM THE EGYPTIANS?

7. A: I'M GOING TO BE IN CAIRO FOR SEVERAL DAYS. IT ISN'T A

ONE-SHOT AFFAIR AND I WOULD HOPE THAT IN THE COURSE OF MY TIME
THERE THAT THIS CAN BE PINNED DOWN. BUT I CAN'T SAY FOR SURE
THAT THAT WILL BE THE CASE.

8. Q: SOR, IF ALL FALLS INTO PLACE, AS YOU SAY, WHAT DO YOU SEE
AS A SCHEDULED SCENARIO? AND WHAT DATES DO YOU ANTICIPATE
THINGS HAPPENING IF IT FALLS INTO PLACE?

9. ATHERTON: IM'M NOT SURE THAT WE'VE ANNOUNCED IN ANY
OFFICIAL WAY WHAT THE SCHEDULE IS, BUT I THINK THERE'S BEEN A GREAT
DEAL OF SPECULATION IN THE PRESS, AND IF YOU HAPPENED TO HAVE
SEEN SPECULATION TO THE EFFECT THAT THE SECRETARY WILL BE
COMING OUT ABOUT THE 5TH OF AUGUST FOR PERHAPS A WEEK YOU
WOULD NOT BE WRONG IN GIVING SOME CREDENCE TO THAT PARTICULAR
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PAGE 04 TEL AV 09633 01 OF 03 281546Z

SPECULATION. AND LET ME ADD ONE OTHER THING, THAT HIS PLAN
WOULD BE TO FIRST HAVE BILATERAL MEETINGS IN JERUSALEM AND IN
CAIRO WITH THE LEADERS OF THESE COUNTRIES BEFORE MOVING INTO A
NEW ROUND OF TRILATERAL TALKS.

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 09633 02 OF 03 281623Z
ACTION NEA-10

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 3 TEL AVIV 9633

CAIRO FOR GEORGE SHERMAN

10. Q: BUT SPECIFICALLY, IF IT FALLS INTO PLACE, WHEN DO YOU SEE THE CONFERENCE TAKING PLACE, WHAT DATE?

11. ATHERTON: WELL, I THINK TOWARDS THE END OF THAT PERIOD. I WOULD SAY SOMETIME AROUND THE 9TH, 10TH, SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

12. Q: DO YOU SEE ANY SETBACKS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS BY THE EGYPTIAN DECISION TO SEND BACK THE ISRAELI MILITARY PRESENCE FROM ALEXANDRIA?

13. ATHERTON: I GUESS THE BEST WAY TO ANSWER THAT IS TO SAY, I HOPE NOT. I THINK OUR PRESS SPOKESMAN YESTERDAY MADE CLEAR THAT WE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED IF THIS STEP NOT HAD BEEN TAKEN. HOWEVER, I DON'T MYSELF SEE IT AS A DISASTEROUS INTERRUPTION IN THE PROCESS. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THERE IS STILL MOMENTUM IN THE PROCESS. MY OWN JUDGEMENT IS THAT IT'S NOT AN IR-REPARABLE SETBACK.
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 09633 02 OF 03 281623Z

14. Q: DO YOU INTEND TO COME BACK TO ISRAEL BEFORE THE SECRETARY COMES TO THE AREA?

15. ATHERTON: YES, I DO.

16. Q: NEXT WEEK?

17. ATHERTON: NEXT WEEK. I'M GOING TO STAY A LITTLE BIT LOOSE ON PRECISELY WHAT DAY, BUT I'M THINKING IN TERMS OF PERHAPS THREE DAYS IN CAIRO AND THEN COME BACK, WHICH WILL PUT ME BACK HERE TOWARDS THE MIDDLE OF NEXT WEEK.

18. Q: AFTER LEEDS MR. VANCE SOUNDED RATHER AFFIRMATIVE ABOUT THE NEXT ROUND AS IF IT HAD BEEN ARRANGED THERE. HAS THERE BEEN SOME BACKTRACKING ON THE PART OF THE EGYPTIANS? DOES THAT ACCOUNT FOR THIS, AND DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THESE LATEST MOVES ARE PART OF A WAR OF NERVES AS BEGIN SEEMS TO IMPLY IN THE MEDIA AND ON TELEVISION?

19. ATHERTON: I WOULD NOT SAY THERE HAS BEEN BACKTRACKING. WE DID NOT HAVE A FINAL, FORMAL COMMITMENT AT THE END OF THE LEEDS TALKS, BUT THE IDEA OF A FURTHER ROUND WAS DISCUSSED IN WAYS THAT CLEARLY IMPLIED THAT ALL WERE THINKING IN THESE TERMS. AND WE'RE STILL AT THAT STAGE. AS K FAR AS SADAT'S LATEST MOVES ARE CONCERNED, I WOULD REALLY NOT LIKE TO TRY TO INTERPRET BEYOND WHAT PRESIDENT SADAT HIMSELF HAS SAID, EXCEPT PERHAPS TO MAKE ONE OBSERVATION THAT, AND THIS IS SOMETHING THAT I'VE SAID MANY TIMES IN TALKING TO SOME OF

YOU AT LEAST ABOUT THESE NEGOTIATIONS, THAT ONE OF THE PRINCIPLE PROBLEMS IS THE DIFFERING PERCEPTION OF EACH SIDE OF WHAT THE OTHER SIDE HAS OR HAS NOT CONCEDED. AND IN THIS PARTICULAR CASE I THINK IT'S VERY CLEAR FROM THE PUBLIC LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 09633 02 OF 03 281623Z

STATEMENTS OF PRESIDENT SADAT, AND CERTAINLY WE GET THE SAME THING IN PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS, HE STILL FEELS THAT IN TERMS OF THE CORE ISSUES OF THE NEGOTIATIONS BY AGREEING TO THE PEACE SIDE OF THE PEACE PREPARATORY FORMULA OF RESOLUTION 242, IN A VERY SPECIFIC SENSE: NORMAL RELATIONS, RECOGNITION AND ALL THOSE THINGS, THAT HE HAS IN A SENSE MADE A MAJOR CONCESSION, AND THAT HE HAS NOT HAD A CORRESPONDING CONCESSION OF THAT MAGNITUDE. I'M NOT MAKING A VALUE JUDGMENT, I'M TRYING TO DESCRIBE A PERCEPTION. THE IDEAS THAT HE DISCUSSED IN AUSTRIA WITH MINISTER WEIZMAN, HE I GUESS FELT WERE IN THAT KIND OF MOOD THAT HE WOULD HOPE TO HAVE, AND HE CLEARLY FEELS THAT THEY WERE REBUFFED. AND THEREFORE THIS LED TO HIS DECISION, AS HE HAS EXPLAINED I THINK, TO HAVE THE DELEGATION -- THE ISRAELI TEAM THAT WAS IN EGYPT -- RETURN TO ISRAEL. I DO NOT SEE IT AS SIMPLY PLAY-ACTING, OR A WAR OF NERVES, IN THE SENSE THAT I THINK YOU'RE INDICATING. BUT NEVERTHELESS, TO BE QUITE PRECISE ABOUT THIS, WE'RE IN A NEGOTIATING SITUATION. WE'RE NOT TRYING TO GET ONE GOING, IT'S STARTED. AND EVEN THE TALKS THAT I'M HAVING WITH EACH SIDE INDIVIDUALLY ARE PART OF THAT PROCESS, AND ANY TIME THERE'S A NEGOTIATING PROCESS GOING ON THERE IS A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF PUBLIC MANEUVERING FOR POSITION. AND I THINK ONE HAS TO, LOOK AT THE PUBLIC STATEMENTS, PUBLIC ACTIONS, IN THAT LIGHT.

20. HOW DO YOU FIND THE ISRAELI POSITION AS RESTATED BY FOREIGN MINISTER DAYAN, AND THE PRIME MINISTER, IN THE KNESSET?

21. ATHERTON: WELL, OUR PRESS SPOKESMAN EXPRESSED APPRECIATION OF THIS YESTERDAY, AND I WOULD SAY MYSELF THAT THIS IS A NEW FORMULATION, A NEW WAY OF DEALING WITH WHAT IS AFTER ALL THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE THAT HAS BEEN AN OBSTACLE TO PROGRESS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS UP TO THE PRESENT TIME. MY OWN VIEW IS THAT IT IS A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION AND IT'S SOMETHING THAT I WILL CERTAINLY BE DISCUSSING IN EGYPT, EXPLAINING TO THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS IN THE EYES OF THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT, AS IT WAS EXPLAINED TO ME IN OUR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 TEL AV 09633 02 OF 03 281623Z

MEETINGS YESTERDAY WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN AND HIS COLLEAGUES.

22. Q. HE TOOK MY QUESTION, MAY I EXTEND IT THOUGH. IF THE RESPONSE IN THE KNESSET HAD BEEN MADE IN RESPONSE TO THE AMERICAN QUESTIONS, WOULD THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN CONTENT WITH IT AT THAT TIME, AND WOULD IT AT THAT TIME HAVE MOVED THE ISSUE, THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS FURTHER?

23. ATHERTON: I ALWAYS HAVE TROUBLE DEALING WITH THESE HYPOTHETICAL IFS, WHEN I'M DEALING WITH THE REALITIES OF A PROCESS YOU CAN'T GO BACK AND DO SOMETHING DIFFERENTLY ONCE IT'S DONE. BUT I THINK AN HONEST ANSWER TO THAT WOULD BE THAT WE WOULD HAVE BEEN PLEASED IF WE HAD HAD, BACK WHEN WE GOT THE ORIGINAL RESPONSES TO OUR QUESTIONS, A RESPONSE OF THE KIND THAT WAS MADE BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER AT THE END OF HIS LATEST SPEECH IN THE KNESSET. I'M NOT CHARACTERIZING IT AS THE LAST WORD. I'VE CAREFULLY SAID I THINK IT'S A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. WE APPRECIATE

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 09633 03 OF 03 281555Z
ACTION NEA-10

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 3 OF 3 TEL AVIV 9633

CAIRO FOR GEORGE SHERMAN

THIS EFFORT, AND WE WILL
SEE WHERE IT CAN LEAD.

23. Q: IF THE TALKS IN THE SINAI DO START, AS YOU HOPE, ON THE 9TH OR 10TH OF AUGUST, HOW LONG DO YOU ENVISAGE THAT THEY

WOULD CONTINUE, AND HOW LONG MIGHT THE SECRETARY STAY OUT
HERE?

24. ATHERTON: I THINK FOR THAT ROUND WE'RE THINKING OF A FEW
DAYS. I CANT REALLY BE MORE PRECISE. IT'S NOT OPEN-ENDED.
THE SECRETARY HAS OTHER COMMITMENTS HE HAS TO GET BACK FOR.
BUT THAT AGAIN DOESNT MEAN THAT THATS THE END. EACH ROUND
LEADS TO ANOTHER ROUND OF ONE KIND OR AN
HER. ONE OF THE
THINGS TO BE DISCUSSED DURING THOSE TALKS WILL BE HOW DO
WE CARRY ON THE TALKS AFTER THIS.

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PAGE 02 TEL AV 09633 03 OF 03 281555Z

25. Q: MR AMBASSADOR, YOU SAID PREVIOUSLY THAT THE NEXT
STAGE WILL REQUIRE A BRIDGING BETWEEN THE GAPS OF THE TWO
PARTIES, DOES THAT MEAN THAT (AT) THE NEXT PHASE, AMERICA
INTENDS TO GIVE PEACE SUGGESTIONS -- TO MAKE A COMPROMISE?

26. ATHERTON: WELL, WEVE ALWAYS SAID THAT WE WOULD, AT A
TIME WHEN WE FELT IT COULD HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT ON MOVING
THE NEGOTIATIONS FORWARD, BE PREPARED TO CONSULT WITH BOTH
SIDES ABOUT IDEAS THAT WE THINK MIGHT HELP RECONCILE THE
DIFFERENCES. I WOULD EXPECT THAT IN THIS NEXT ROUND OF TALKS
WE MAY WELL BE APPROACHING THAT POINT, BUT AGAIN LET ME
STRESS THAT THE FIRST THING THATS GOING TO HAPPEN IS THAT
THE SECRETARY IS GOING TO COME OUT AND TALK WITH MR BEGIN
AND THEN GO TO CAIRO AND TALK WITH PRESIDENT SADAT, AND OUR
DECISIONS WILL BE TAKEN IN CONSULTATIONS WITH BOTH SIDES AS WE
PREPARE FOR THIS NEXT ROUND OF TALKS, SO I DONT WANT TO GET
TOO PRECISE ON THIS, BUT I SEE THIS AS A TIME WHEN THIS
PROCESS COULD WELL BEGIN.

DECISIONS WILL BE TAKEN IN CONSULTATIONS WITH BOTH SIDES AS WE
PREPARE FOR THIS NEXT ROUND OF TALKS, SO I DONT WANT TO GET
TOO PRECISE ON THIS, BUT I SEE THIS AS A TIME WHEN THIS
PROCESS COULD WELL BEGIN.

27. Q: THE PRIME MINISTER SAID EARLIER TODAY THAT IF EGYPT
WOULD NOT COME TO AN AGREEMENT - TO A COMPRE ENSIVE AGREEMENT -
ISRAEL WOULD BE READY TO CONSIDER ALSO A SORT OF PARTIAL
AGREEMENT, DO YOU THINK ITS FEASIBLE TO DISCUSS SUCH A ...

28. ATHERTON: PARTIAL AGREEMENT?

29. Q: ... HE SAID PARTIAL, YES PARTIAL/PERMANENT HE CALLED
IT... I DONT KNOW.. IN THE ESSENCE I THINK ITS SORT OF AN
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PAGE 03 TEL AV 09633 03 OF 03 281555Z

INTERIM AGREEMENT, WHERE IT STATES TO A COMPREHENSIVE ...

30. ATHERTON: FROM OUR VIEW POINT WE ARE CONTINUING TO APPROACH THIS AS NEGOTIATIONS LOOKING TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE AGREEMENT. NOW OBVIOUSLY ANY ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES THAT EITHER SIDE WANTS TO SUGGEST, AND THESE CERTAINLY COULD BE DISCUSSED, BUT AT THIS STAGE OUR VIEW IS THAT THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS STILL HAS A NUMBER OF POSITIVE ELEMENTS IN IT; THE LEEDS TALKS DID REVEAL A FAIR AMOUNT OF COMMON GROUND, AT LEAST WITH REGARD TO THE FIVE-YEAR PERIOD THE PRINCIPAL DIFFERENCES - THERE ARE DIFFERENCES THAT ARE TRUE BUT THE PRINCIPAL DIFFERENCE OBVIOUSLY REMAINS AS TO WHAT CAN BE AGREED TODAY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS AT THE END OF FIVE YEARS. WE THINK THAT ENOUGH OF A POSITIVE NATURE EXISTS TO JUSTIFY CONTINUING TO KEEP OUR EYES ON THE OBJECTIVE OF A COMPREHENSIVE AGREEMENT AT THIS STAGE. COULD I GO BACK? I JUST HAVE ONE OTHER THOUGHT ON THE PREVIOUS QUESTION THAT I THINK ITS IMPORTANT PERHAPS TO EMPHASIZE THE QUESTION OF AMERICAN IDEAS AND HOW THEY MIGHT - WHEN AND HOW THEY MIGHT BE INTRODUCED. AND I JUST WANT TO EMPHASIZE THAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT A ROLE IN WHICH, AS PART OF A PROCESS OF NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE PARTIES AND EVOLVING FROM THOSE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE PARTIES AND EVOLVING FROM THOSE NEGOTIATIONS AND FROM THE EXCHANGES AND THE PROPOSALS OF THE TWO SIDES, WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO DRAW CERTAIN THINGS TOGETHER. I WANT TO EMPHASIZE THAT, BECAUSE SOMETIMES THERE IS AN IMPRESSION THAT AT SOME POINT THE NEGOTIATIONS STOP, AND THEN THE UNITED STATES COMES IN AND THAT IS NOT THE PROCESS WE ARE TALKING ABOUT. WE ARE TALKING ABOUT A ROLE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THIS ONGOING EXCHANGE BETWEEN THE PARTIES THEMSELVES.

31. Q: WILL VANCE AND HIS PARTY LEAVE WASHINGTON WITHOUT A COMMITMENT FROM SADAT ON THE FOURTH OR THE FIFTH, WHENEVER THEIR DEPARTURE DATE IS?

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PAGE 04 TEL AV 09633 03 OF 03 281555Z

32. ATHERTON: WELL, WE CERTAINLY WOULD I THINK VERY MUCH HOPE THAT THE AGREEMENT ON THE TALKS WOULD BE PINNED DOWN BEFORE THE SECRETARY LEAVES. I'M AFRAID TO GET A MORE PRECISE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION IS REALLY SOMETHING THAT WILL HAVE TO BE ADDRESSED BACK IN WASHINGTON TO THE DEPARTMENT PRESS SPOKESMAN. I CANT GIVE YOU A MORE PRECISE ANSWER, THAN THAT. END TEXT OF FIRST PART OF TRANSCRIPT.
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